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ABSTRACT

The objective of the American Association of Community College's President's Academy Summer Experience was to help participants develop competency in analyzing external factors through an environmental scanning workshop. The workshop focused on identifying and selecting the most significant events facing participants' colleges, identifying indications that the events could occur, determining implications, and providing recommendations for college leaders. Working in 7 groups, participants identified 88 critical events, with each group analyzing indications, implications, and courses of action for one event. The following events were analyzed: (1) between 50% and 98% of community college students will be active users of instructional and communications technology; (2) the election of a conservative majority in the Congress and and a conservative president in 1996; (3) the disappearance of up to 50% of community college primary state and local funding sources; (4) the development by American industry of systems to independently train and continuously educate employees within 5 years; (5) joint ventures on the part of Microsoft, Disney, and ATT&T to provide the first 2 years of higher education; (6) a 30% reduction in federal funding for programs related to the community college mission; and (7) the use of distance education by 25% of all students. (A complete list of events identified by participants is included.) (KP)

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Critical Events Affecting the Future of Community Colleges

Proceedings of the

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July 9-13, 1995
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Critical Events Affecting the Future of Community Colleges

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We are being bombarded by tumultuous forces for change as we go into the 21st Century: Virtual classrooms, global communications, global economies, telecourses, distance learning, corporate classrooms, increased competition among social agencies for scarce resources, pressure for institutional mergers, state-wide program review and so on. In order to plan effectively in this environment, community college leaders must be able to anticipate new developments on their institutions and curricular programs.

Wayne Gretzky once said, "I skate to where the puck will be." For strategic planning to be successful, we must anticipate "where the puck will be."

The external analysis component of strategic planning is the anticipatory component whose task is to ascertain where the puck will be. This component consists of *scanning* the environment to identify changing trends and potential developments, *monitoring* specific trends and patterns, *forecasting* the future direction of these changes and potential developments, and *assessing* their organizational impact. Merged with an internal analysis of the organization's vision, mission, strengths, and weaknesses, external analysis assists decisionmakers in formulating strategic directions and strategic plans (see Figure 1).

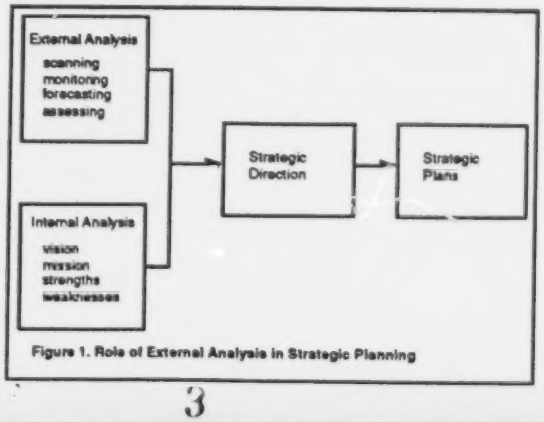

Figure 1. Role of External Analysis in Strategic Planning

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The objective of the 1995 AACC President's Academy Summer Experience environmental scanning workshop was to assist you to develop competency in establishing and maintaining an external analysis capability on your campus. Although the description of how to do this is available in earlier publications (Morrison, 1992; Morrison & Mecca, 1989; Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher, 1984), the workshop offered an opportunity to use several techniques (e.g., identifying and forecasting potential events and their impacts) used in anticipatory strategic management. Moreover, the intent was that this experience would enable you to replicate the workshop.

This is a report of the proceedings of the workshop. It is intended to summarize the outcomes of exercises and put these exercises in the context of a strategic planning process, so that you may use them as a guide in conjunction with the references cited above when you implement a similar workshop on your campus.

In the workshop we focused on (a) identifying events, (b) selecting the most significant events, (c) identifying the signals that indicated these events could occur, (d) drawing out the implications of each selected event if it were to occur, and (e) concluding with a set of recommendations for community college leaders. To do so, we used the Nominal Group Process (NGP).

The Nominal Group Process

The Nominal Group Process is an efficient small group process that ensures balanced participation. It requires participants to first think about the question (i.e., what potential events can affect the future?) and write down their thoughts on a sheet of paper. After a suitable time, the facilitator uses a round robin approach where each participant in turn is asked to nominate an event. Only one nomination is given by each participant. Participants are asked to nominate those events that could be most critical to community colleges. Each statement is written on the flip chart so that all can see the nominations. The next person is asked to submit their "best" candidate. During this time the only person talking is

the person nominating a statement; all others are requested to think about the statement to see if it stimulates an idea that they had not had before.

Under normal circumstances this process goes on until there are no more nominations, at which time the facilitator guides the group in a discussion of each nomination to clarify, discuss, edit, and remove redundancies. The value of this process is first to have participants think before talking, and then to get the thinking of all people in the groups. Given the severe time constraints, we limited nominations to one round, with the provision that other nominations could crop up during the clarification and discussion phase.

Events

The first exercise was to identify potential events that could affect the future of community colleges if they occurred. Events are unambiguous and confirmable. When they occur, the future is different. Event identification and analysis is critical in anticipatory organizational planning.

It is important that an event statement be unambiguous; otherwise, it is not helpful in the planning process because (a) it is unclear what may be meant by the statement (i.e., different people may understand the statement differently) and (b) we have no clear target that allows us to derive implications and action steps. For example, consider the following event statement: *There will be significant changes in political, social, and economic systems in the U.S.* Each person on a planning team may agree with this statement, but may also interpret it differently. It would be far more useful in analysis for a statement like: *In the next election, the political right gains control of Congress and the presidency.* Or *Minorities become the majority in 10 states.* Or *The European Community incorporates Eastern Europe in a free trade zone.* The latter statements are concrete, unambiguous, and signal significant change that could impact community colleges.

Another point. We should not include an impact statement in the event statement. Consider the following event statement: *Passage of welfare and*

immigration reform will negatively impact higher education and the community college sector. First, we need to specify each welfare reform idea and each immigration reform idea as an event. Second, it may well be that an event can have both a positive and a negative impact. For example, there may be signals that within five years 30% of college and university courses will use multimedia technologies in instruction. This event could have both positive and negative consequences on your community college. If, for example, the faculty are not currently oriented to using multimedia technology, the event may adversely affect the competitive position of your institution. On the other hand, distributing the signals of this event in a newsletter to your faculty may bring about an awareness of what is happening and assist in developing a desire to upgrade their set of teaching skills.

Identification of Critical Events

Each group was given 20 minutes to identify potential events and 30 minutes to discuss, clarify, and select their three most significant events. What follows is a list of the events identified by group. Those events in bold are the most significant events. Those events that need more specificity or that include the impact of the event are noted with an asterisk. Unfortunately, we did not have time to make them more unambiguous; they are included in the proceedings because they contain an important idea that we do not want to lose.

Group 1

1. Community colleges will be responsible for all remedial education in public higher education.

2. **75% reduction in Federal financial aid**

3. 30% increase in children without adequate parenting

4. 25% increase in insurance costs for community colleges

5. 20% increase in student litigation

6. 20% of the community colleges in the U.S. conduct 85% of all workforce training

7. *Community colleges will be required to do more with less

8. *There will be no distinction between academic transfer and technical education

9. 25% of community college students will acquire part of their education using distance education (e.g., TV, computer, etc.)

10. The number of people who will continue to work beyond age 65 will increase by 30%

11. *There will be significant changes in political, social, and economic systems in the U.S.

Group 2

1. 30% of students receive education through distance learning

2. 30% increase in crime in public schools

3. 30% reduction of state funds to state supported colleges

4. Every citizen will take courses in the home via distance learning technologies

5. ***Passage of welfare and immigration reform will negatively impact higher education and the community college sector**

6. 25% decrease in male college population

7. 35% of U.S. population over 65

8. 90% of students under 20 are technologically superior to teachers

9. *Widespread dissolution of accreditation standards.

10. *Decrease of public confidence in public education.

11. *Sizable increase in students with emotional and physical disabilities.

12. *Increase of immigrant students with lack of English proficiency.

13. *Commercialism of higher education

14. *Government out of financial aid.

15. *Trend toward regulation of graduation requirements

16. *Increased accountability

17. *Single entry into homes and wireless technology.

18. *Continued increases of tuition

19. *Most trade barriers eliminated.

20. *More demands for multiculturalism and bilingualism.

21. *Widening gap between haves and have nots

Group 3

1. **25% decline in public financial support**

2. 25% of all higher education students will take classes via distance education

3. **Microsoft, Disney, AT&T announce joint venture to produce first two years of higher education**

4. **Communication technology (e.g., ISDN) will be universally available**

5. Within five years regional accreditation will no longer exist.

6. Within 5 years, 10% of all faculty members will be replaced by information technology

7. Within next 5 years, high schools will produce students who meet ASSET entry scores
   (Note: this statement implies that students graduating from high school now do not meet ASSET entry scores.)

Group 4

1. **Major American industries will develop systems to train and continuously educate employees for themselves and similar companies using a combination of information technologies.**

2. 25% of state legislatures will require mergers of institutions of higher education

3. **State appropriations will decrease by 20%**

4. *Gradual elimination of local funding due to competing needs

5. Federal support reduced 30%

6. 50% of students will be required to use computers.

7. Four-year colleges and universities will offer their curriculums via distance learning

8. *Significant expansion of "for profit" teaching universities.

9. *Increasing state and federal demands for accountability tied to performance standards.

10. Loss of funding at federal, state, and local levels

11. **Federal funds for vocational and training programs are collapsed into bloc grants for state distribution**

12. 25% cut in financial aid

13. Carnegie unit replaced by performance/competence indicator

14. *Four-year colleges and universities offering more AA/AAS/AS degree programs

Group 5

1. Flat tax implemented

2. 90% property tax eliminated

3. 50% of higher education courses will be taught from remote sites

4. *There will be a drastic shift in population demographics; minority moving from larger cities to rural America

5. All curriculums will be outcome-based

6. 20% reduction in state supported funding

7. 50% reduction in Federally funded financial aid

8. 65% of high school graduates computer literate

9. All federal funding will convert to bloc grants

10. 90% of entering community college students are academically underprepared

11. 50% increase in the demand for local scholarship funds.

12. *Decline in resources will require increased cooperation with non-educational entities
(Note: This is not an event statement. This is an implication of the decline of funds from customary sources.)

13. 50% increase in using technology in instruction

14. Affirmative action programs abolished

15. 64% of faculty refuse to use technology in their instruction

16. Majority of sates pass voucher initiatives

Group 6

1. *Funding mechanisms will completely change

2. **The new majority is re-elected in 96 along with a conservative president**

3. Tenure is abolished

4. U.S. Department of Education eliminated

5. **Major war with US involvement**

6. **Minority groups form political coalitions**

7. Religious right controls American politics

8. *Militias become powerful

9. Jones Cable is accredited

10. Jones Cable offers instructional programs in every American community

Group 7

1. **Community colleges will compete nationally and internationally for students via distance learning.**

2. ***There will be multiple national political and social agendas by the year 2000.**

3. **80% of Federal funding for education will be through bloc grants**

4. 50-98% of community college students will use interactive media including virtual reality

5. 40% of current community college faculty and administration will retire

6. US Department of Education eliminated

7. President Clinton appoints two Supreme Court Justices with community college experience

8. Community college enrollments reduced 30%

9. Private corporate schools increase enrollment by 30%

Event Analysis

The second exercise was for each group to select one event, identify the signals that indicated that the event could occur within five years, the implications for community colleges if the event occurred, and their recommendations to community college leaders based on these implications. The results are recorded below by group, beginning with Group 7..

Group 7

Event: 50-98.9% of our students will be active users of instructional and communications technology

Signals

1. elementary/middle/high school students expand to far more technology
2. more and more software vendors and more readily available software at lower cost
3. technology readily available in homes
4. preschool children given interactive games
5. video/interactive/virtual reality games available in all malls
6. remote and isolated schools/colleges do not have the necessary telecommunications infrastructure to implement programs
7. the number of grants from NSF to implement telecommunications is increasing
8. increasing partnerships between business/industry/government/agencies and education to facilitate infrastructure development

9. increased deregulation of the communications industry
10. new faculty have higher desire to use technology

Implications

1. technology alone does not teach
2. to be competitive, we must have up-to-date technology
3. students expect that we be up to date
4. reallocation of resources required
5. huge increase in costs of maintenance upgrade/training
6. increased collaborative learning with teacher as facilitator
7. team approach to support faculty/technicians/students
8. remote schools, without infrastructure, fall farther behind cannot compete nationally or internationally
9. teacher not only a facilitator but a technician as well
10. technology not provide all answers to the education process

need to educate people as well as train them

What Should Community College Leaders Do?

1. Ensure staff development at all levels
2. Design collaborative efforts for funding and technology delivery
3. Develop collaborative efforts in curriculum development
4. Pursue available materials (don't reinvent the wheel)
5. Develop collaborative planning and technology implementation
6. Secure buy-in by unions
7. Redefine faculty loads and qualifications
8. Market efforts in our use of technology
9. Employ quality control measures
10. Eliminate "turf battles" among colleges
11. Resolve accreditation issues
12. Develop new processes for working with current advisory committees
13. Give priority to cooperation with institutions within and without the state

Group 6

Event: A new majority is re-elected in 1996 along with a conservative president

Signals

1. Popularity of Newt Gingrich and his book
2. 1994 Election
3. Popularity of conservative TV/radio shows
4. Number of conservative governors and legislators
5. Growth of militia movement
6. Raised awareness of the size of the national debt

Implications

1. Categorical funding eliminated
2. Funding mechanisms will change
3. New ways needed to communicate with new audiences
4. Open access of community colleges may be challenged (economically & academically)
5. Increased flexibility
6. Challenge of traditional structures/staffing (e.g., tenure, faculty productivity)
7. Administration/staff productivity changes and challenges
8. Academic freedom threatened
9. Students additionally burdened with increased tuition
10. Community college enrollment will decline as a direct result of increased cost
11. Social burden
12. Lost ability to invest in the national economic infrastructure

What should community college leaders do?

1. Retire and turn it over to the faculty
2. Be the creative folks we know how to be
3. Become more politically active
4. Sponsor voter education classes
5. Align more closely with trustees organizations
6. Sell skills and abilities of our college
7. Enlist business advocates
8. Understand and use the language of the conservative coalition

9. Build coalitions across *all* sectors of education (e.g., K-12, Postsecondary, business/industry)
10. Conduct an institutional self examination to improve our ability to respond positively to change
11. Remain good stewards of the public trust (e.g., finances)

Group 5

Event: Up to 50% of community college primary state and local funding sources will disappear

Signals

1. State funding formulas are not being fully implemented
2. Current and proposed legislation to reduce local funding
3. Competition for state funds (i.e., prisons)
4. Impact of national, regional economic decline of state funding base
5. More conservative politicians being elected
6. Growing anti-tax sentiment
7. Growing distrust of all public entities including higher education
8. Demand for more accountability

Implications

1. Do "more for less"
2. Greater reliance on private resources
3. Student fees will increase
4. Enrollment caps will be set externally
5. Erosion of open door for educationally and economically disadvantaged (lip service)
6. More emphasis on quality outcomes
7. Will ignore neglected majority
8. Need for more partnerships with business and industry
9. Need to define mission and goals

What should community college leaders do?

1. Engage in community building for greater advocacy (i.e., with parents, business/industry)

2. Tell our story more effectively
3. Engage in more private fund raising efforts
4. Work with politicians for greater political advocacy
5. Involve campus community in setting priorities for use of diminished resources
6. Restructure educational delivery for more effectiveness
7. Work toward eliminating costly external mandates and regulations
8. Drop costly programs
9. Buy lottery tickets

Group 4

Event: Within 5 years, major American industry will develop a system to train and continuously educate employees for themselves and for similar companies using a combination of various information technologies

Signals

1. Decrease in contract training requests
2. Enrollment decrease in business and industry courses
3. Student reports of increased worksite learning
4. Business and industry communication infrastructure exists for more effective training
5. Colleges cannot afford to supply needed training
6. Advertisements and promotion of companies indicating what they provide
7. Increase in national training packages
8. Companies "self analyzing" skills needed
9. Requests for partnerships increase
10. Erosion of previous partnerships
11. New announcements of corporate offerings
12. Existence of industry-run colleges
13. Increase in industry associations focused on training

Implications

1. Increased allocation of resources
2. Reduced revenue from business and industry courses
3. Less dollars available for curriculum development and equipment
4. Lose ground in new delivery techniques
5. More creative recognition of "credit" for industry training
6. More aggressive response to training needs
7. Loss of key mission component, i.e., "community focus" to become more like JC's vs. comprehensive offerings
8. Opportunities for new partnerships
9. Changing political support
10. Potential loss of key faculty
11. Clearer focus on industry training mission
12. Some faculty will welcome change
13. Faculty and staff reduction
14. More parental acceptance of technical training

What should community college leaders do?

1. Clarify mission vis a vie business and industry training
2. Increase investment in faculty and staff training
3. Establish regional councils to coordinate school to work initiatives and training
4. Develop partnerships with communications technology companies
5. Develop partnerships to define needed skills and recognition of "credit" offered by others
6. Focus on outreach efforts
7. Develop more CEO contacts
8. Be more aggressive to addressing and responding to needs
9. Reallocate resources
10. Develop more state/college partnerships for training
11. Develop and implement marketing plan strategies aimed at increasing business and industry training
12. Replace "credit" mentality in colleges
13. Market technical training more effectively to parents and students
14. Foster industry consortia
15. Increase partnerships with others (i.e., chambers of commerce)

16. Create schedules that are not time or place bound
17. Expand teaching methodology options, etc.

Group 3

Event: Microsoft, Disney and AT&T will announce joint ventures to produced first two years of higher education

Signals

1. Bill Gates offers to do that (and has the money)
2. Courses and programs are already offered by corporations
3. Communications companies (i.e., cable and phone) are consolidating
4. Consumers accept distance
5. League for Innovation and Jones International are already doing this
6. Students are attracted to non-traditional, flexible schedules
7. Government contracts are enticing to private sector especially with state legislators disgruntlement with higher education studies -with message that private sector can do it better
8. Investors are recognizing the value of the younger generation adapting to telecommunications
9. There will be a loss of enrollment in traditional courses
10. Cable TV offers Mind Extension University courses
11. Increasing availability of inexpensive communication technology

Implications

1. Changes in accreditation, governance, and legislative transferability—local, state, federal
2. Funding formulas will change (affecting haves and have nots)
3. Increased partnerships with community college/university/private sector
4. Change in role of faculty (to manager of instruction and facilitator of learning)
5. Will freshen a stale curriculum
6. End of community college monopoly
7. Faculty will develop technical software, etc. rather than use books

8. Place-bound students (women and rural students) will have equal access to experiences
9. Losses or gains in enrollment

What should community college leaders do?

1. Embrace concepts of technology
2. Develop our greatest resource—faculty and staff—so they can lead the charge and so that they will not be afraid or fight change
3. Be accountable—prove our successes, benefit of range of services
4. Focus on changing the expectations of faculty—alternative delivery, retention as issue
5. Expert competencies in informational technology
6. Form consortium to compete and build d on instructional strengths
7. Alternative modes of delivery
8. Criteria for hiring changed—hire on basis of how flexible the person is
9. Transfer educational practices to
10. Show through strategic plans that the college is putting plans and actions where values are
11. Invest in technology on campuses; include connections with the community
12. Increase faculty and staff training in technology
13. Develop partnerships with private sector
14. Lobby legislature for changed funding towards outcomes, not process
15. Lobby legislature to provide appropriations for infrastructure (e.g., fiberoptics)

Group 2

Event: 30% reduction in federal funding for programs related to the community college mission

Signals

1. Lack of participation in the political process by the "have nots"
2. State actions requiring welfare recipients to work, or else
3. Federal movement to eliminate legal alien participation in social welfare programs

4. Technology is in the hands of the "haves"
5. Results of national and state elections

Implications

1. Angry students and public
2. Reduced access to higher education
3. Fewer support services
4. Inability of colleges to produce adequate work force
5. Reduced enrollment
6. Must do more with less
7. Community colleges will do less

What should community college leaders do?

1. Seek alternatives for federal funding
2. Form new partnerships
3. Eliminate duplication in programs
4. Educate internal and external audiences to events and consequences of the event
5. Build student & community capacity to function in a democratic society
6. Find new resources and funding

Group 1

Event: 25% of all students will use distance education

Signals

1. Availability of more grant money
2. Rapid advancement of affordable technology
3. Mergers of telecommunications companies
4. More demand for education; easier access
5. More information available to us as practitioners
6. More on-site needed by business and industry
7. Popularization of technology
8. More state initiatives
9. Students are increasingly more technology literate
10. Faculty are more experienced and better with technology uses

11. More resources dedicated by colleges
12. Emergence of specialized (commercial) organizations that deliver distance education (e.g., Mind-Extension University and National University)

Implications

1. Community colleges will be to rethink vision/mission vis-a-vis traditional components and emerging compartmentalization of those components
2. Shifts in budgeting priorities
3. Prescribed shift in attitude and behavior of faculty relative to learning and teaching
4. Change in composition of students
5. Impact on student services
6. Differential impact relative to college size and capacity to deal with competitive mix
7. Working relationship and delivery of services to business and industry will change

What should community college leaders do?

1. Develop collaborative efforts with other community colleges, business/industry, area agencies, four-year colleges, high schools
2. Find out what competition is doing
3. Help faculty and staff develop collaborative skills to prepare and adapt
4. Develop a collaborative skills set for college leadership and faculty and staff to effectively facilitate adaptation and change to a collaborative paradigm
5. Seek support from AACC and state agencies to endorse regional collaboration
6. Rethink mission
7. Identify dollars in budget that will influence collaboration shift
8. Study options before leaping
9. Create community-college task forces with business and industry and community

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Discussion

Establishing a comprehensive environmental scanning system on a campus to inform planning requires a good deal of time from everyone involved in the process. Fortunately, we can take advantage of the information highway and can share resources via *Horizon List* and *Horizon Home Page*. *Horizon List* offers the opportunity to respond to draft articles focusing on emerging trends and potential events (for example, I will insert these proceedings on the list and home page to stimulate discussion when I get home). *Horizon Home Page* has a futures planning database of abstracts describing signals of change in the macroenvironment that can affect education; please review this section and please add to it. You may subscribe to *Horizon List* by sending the following message to listserve@unc.edu: subscribe horizon <yourfirstname> <yourlastname>. You may view and contribute to *Horizon Home Page* by turning your browser to the following URL address: http://sunsite.unc.edu/horizon. And these services are absolutely free to those who have access to the Internet.

To stimulate and focus discussion of the implications of emerging tends and potential events on your campus, recommend to the chair of your planning committee that she/he order a site license subscription to *On the Horizon*. View each issue of *On the Horizon* as a pump-primer to organizational planning. For example, the chair's cover letter to the first issue should urge planning committee members to consider how the content of particular items in the newsletter affect the institution and to write down their thoughts (or send them to the group via e-mail); their collective thoughts would be used to begin discussion at the next committee meeting.

Before the meeting, the chair could compose a questionnaire identifying those articles in *On the Horizon* that may affect either the organization as a whole or particular curricular programs. He/she should ask committee members to rank-order the most important ones, and follow this rank order for the discussion agenda.

As the committee becomes accustomed to this process, the chair should request members to send articles, notes, or commentary that they encounter in their reading and at conferences about potential developments that could affect the organization. They should use the structure of the newsletter: send information about signals of change in the STEEP (i.e., *social, technological, economic, environmental,* and *political*) categories, particularly on the local and regional levels (*On the Horizon* tends to focus on the national and international levels). The reason for using this structure is that developments in one sector affect developments in other sectors (i.e., a war in the Middle East affects fuel prices everywhere); therefore, in order to anticipate change, we need to look for developments that may have direct or indirect effects on the organization.

Committee members should examine sources for change in relevant variables (e.g., immigration, price of computers, mood of voters). What change is already taking place? Is there a movement upward or downward? What are the projections? What are the emerging trends (i.e., what combinations of data points—past trends, events, precursors—suggest and support the early stages of a possible trend)? What external events, policies, or regulatory actions would affect or be affected by the projections? They should look for forecasts by experts, and append their own implications section to the emerging issues, critical trends, or potential developments when they send their information items.

The chair should summarize the articles and their implications in the cover letter when sending the next issue of *On the Horizon,* and include a questionnaire asking each committee member to rank the five most important items submitted by the committee or included in the newsletter.

The agenda for the planning meeting should include the top items. At the meeting, focused around these items, committee members should draw out the implications of the potential developments for ongoing organizational and program planning. They may want more information about a particular trend or potential event. In this case, enlist the aid of a research staffer or librarian (who should be on the planning committee anyway).

Regularly circulating information about potential developments and asking committee members to think of their implications reinforces a future-oriented posture in our colleagues. They will begin to read, hear, and talk about this information not only as something intellectually interesting but as information they can use in practical organizational planning.

Conclusion

The preconference workshop was conducted in a restricted time frame. It was, however, sufficient to give you experience in using several basic approaches to transform information into strategic intelligence for your institution. This experience, in conjunction with the references cited earlier, should help you establish and maintain an environmental scanning capability on your campus.

You have other resources available. One of the major reasons for publishing *On the Horizon* is to bring you and your colleagues the expertise and foresight of an exceptional and diverse editorial board. Our objective is to alert you to potential developments and emerging trends that may affect your organization so that you can plan for the future more effectively.

Horizon List and *Horizon Home Page* allow you to participate in and contribute to an on-going dialogue of signals of change in the external environment and their implications for the future of education. Please subscribe to *Horizon List,* browse *Horizon Home Page*, and enter into these important discussions with colleagues all over the world.

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